DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 054 468 CG 006 573

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TITLE Systematic Behavioral Goals for Counselor Education.

INSTITUTION Michigan State Univ., East Lansing.

PUB DATE 7 Apr 71

NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at American Personnel and Guidance Association convention, Atlantic City, N. J., April 4-8, 1971

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29

DESCRIPTORS *Behavioral Objectives; Behavior Change; Counseling Effectiveness; Counselor Educators; *Counselor Performance; *Counselor Training; Educational Innovation; *Educational Objectives; Graduate Students; Microcounseling; Models; Practicums; Systems Analysis; *Systems Approach

ABSTRACT

Counselor education programs, asserts the author, typically have not lent themselves to accurate assessment. He maintains that true evaluation can be realized only when all therapeutic and instructional goals are stated in terms of performance or observable behavior. Systems analysis is viewed as offering a useful approach for redirecting and reorganizing counselor preparation programs so as to facilitate and insure that they prepare counselors who are able to effect changes in client behavior. Several working models of counselor education systems are exemplified: (1) the Stanford model; (2) the Michigan State model; and (3) the Microcounseling approach developed at the University of Massachusetts and Colorado State University. How to construct a behaviorally specific instructional objective is the subject of a brief digression. (TL)

ED054468

# Systematic Behavioral Goals For Counselor Education

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Abstract:

The ultimate criterion of counselor competence is generally recognized as the ability to effect adaptive changes in the cognitive, affective, motor, and/or somatic behavior of clients. It follows, therefore, that counselor preparation programs ought to be organized in such a way as to facilitate and insure the acquisition of this capacity. Systems analysis offers a useful approach for the redirection of counselor education. Intrinsic to this point of view is the formulation of high fidelity training objectives stated in terms of what the counselor candidate will be doing as a result of instruction.

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A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association in Atlantic City, New Jersey, April 7, 1971

CG 006 573

Counselor Education: The State of the Problem

Models of counselor education are legion: even a cursory listing could comprise a volume in itself. A number of suggested training programs have appeared in the literature; others have been proposed by curriculum committees oftentimes "renewing themselves" a la Gardner (1965). Still other models of counselor education have been permanently chiseled into the codes of various organizations or the certification statutes of sundry states.[1]

It should be noted that not all of these models are in conflict with one another; many of the differences are strictly semantic in nature. Most preparation programs are expressly designed to enable the counselor to function on the job. But are they, in fact, accomplishing what they purport to accomplish? Though the academic road to counselor competence may be paved with noble (and global) intentions, several studies have implied that degree of training bears little relationship to counselor effectiveness (e.g. Joslin, 1965; Engelkes & Roberts, 1970; Schmidt & Strong, 1970; Truax & Lister, 1970).

Part of the problem here is that traditional models of counselor education seem to stress the acquisition rather than the application of knowledge. A further difficulty lies in the fact that model builders take an understandable pride in the fruits of their labors. If left unchecked, however, such pride may well become delusional delight in having discovered "the way things <u>really</u> are" or "how things <u>should</u> be." To the contrary, models exist in science and education because they are useful. There is no pretense that they are in any other sense "correct" (Logan & Wagner, 1965).

How, then, does one assess the utility of a counselor education program?

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[1] See, for example, <u>Counselor Education & Supervision</u>, 1968, 7 (3SP).

Ultimately, as Cook (1970) points out, "The crucial question should be, Are graduates of our program effective in helping people improve their own lives in the various settings in which the helping activity takes place?" Such an inquiry poses a formidable research task. Of more immediate concern to the counselor educator might be an investigation into whether graduates of his program can demonstrate the skills which are (or are assumed to be) essential to the helping relationship.

Before any evaluation of counseling or counselor education can be attempted, however, all therapeutic and instructional goals must be stated in a measurable manner. Objectives not stated in terms of performance or observable behavior can never be evaluated. Perhaps failure to respond to Cook's question is based as much on fear of accountability as disregard of it. After all, counselor educators do as much good as counselors. Don't they?

Toward a Systems Solution

Briefly, a system might be described as an integrated and related set of components (subsystems) organized for the purpose of obtaining a specific objective. Though a number of expansive definitions for systems analysis have been attempted, none seem to do it justice. Writers today tend to speak of the "systems approach" (Silverin, 1968), thus describing how it works rather than what it is. Systems thinking grew out of attempts by the military, industry, and finally education to cope with the vast complexity of their programs.

Several recent articles have described how the systems approach can be applied to counseling and counselor education (Yellon, 1969; Thoreson, 1969; Hosford & Ryan, 1970). Perhaps the most conspicuous characteristic of a counselor education system is its goal direction. Such programs are "mission-oriented rather than method- or discipline-oriented (Thoreson, 1969)." Once the training

goals are identified, the systematic counselor educator strives to achieve the most efficient blending of men, methods, materials, and machines necessary for their attainment.

These training objectives need not be static. Counselor education is an "open" system; its goals can and should be modified to reflect the changing needs of society. The "antiseptic office" approach of the 50's is giving way to the environmental orientation of the 70's. Both "chicken soup" and "rifles" (Aspy, 1970) may be dispensed; no course title or even content is to be held sacred.

Additional features of systematic counselor education include 1) Flowcharts which depict the relationship of the components (subsystems) to each other and to the system as a whole, and 2) Feedback mechanisms which determine goal attainment and efficiency of system activity. Most programs of this type also employ non-competitive, nonpunitive grading: "Provision is included to permit each trainee to progress at his own rate of learning through each of the subsystems and to go through (re-cycle) the subsystems as many times as is necessary to attain the specified goals of the system (Pate & LaFleur, 1970)."

Behavioral Goals

Without specifically formulated behavioral goals, the accountability of a counseling curriculum is highly suspect. Hence, the most essential component of the systems approach to counselor education is the identification of training objectives stated in terms of what the counselor candidate will be doing as a result of instruction. Such performance criteria are needed not only to improve the economic efficiency of the training program, but also to substantiate the claim that counselor education does, in fact, accomplish what it purports to accomplish.

Though counselors and counselor educators may quibble over the desirability

of certain objectives, any goal may be accepted (at least temporarily) into a systems framework as long as it is stated in behavioral terms. Krumboltz (1966), for example, has succinctly argued against the suitability of self-understanding as a goal of counseling. But Hosford and Ryan (1970) admit "there is...nothing wrong with...increasing the client's self-understanding, as long as we define what is meant when an individual achieves this objective." In a recent paper by Thoreson (1971) a number of humanistic concerns were brilliantly translated into behavioral terminology; it would thus appear that the door to the systems approach is open to everyone.

## Counselor Education Systems: Working Examples

### The Stanford Model

The Behavioral Systems Training Program at Stanford University is divided into eight subsystems (see Figure 1). Each subsystem is roughly equivalent to a traditional academic area, but the accent is of course on performance.

Consider subsystem 5, "Decision Making Skills": Thirty-eight individual objectives have been identified. Not all of the objectives must be followed in order of sequence, but by the end of the subsystem each counselor candidate will have made "at least one accurate and helpful probability statement from test scores or other predictive data" when counseling an actual client (Krumboltz et al, 1971). The trainees will also have presented evidence for helping at least one client apply the decision-making process (Krumboltz & Baker, 1970) to a particular problem.

Several objectives in the "Counseling in Groups" subsystem at Stanford demand audio-tape accountability. An early requirement, for instance, is that the counselor candidate explain the "whats, hows and whys" of group counseling to an audience of counselors, parents, and/or teachers, and then present a

recording of his performance to the instructor. And before completing the subsystem, each of the trainees will have played "at least three experts demonstrating (the) use of a particular group technique in a group setting (Krumboltz et al, 1971)."

## The Michigan State Model

In the counselor training program at Michigan State University, the process of counseling has been conceptualized as a system composed of ten sequential subsystems (each of which in turn may be broken down into a number of more specific subsystems). Figure 2 depicts a simplified overview of this counseling model.

All Master's level counselor candidates at Michigan State must enroll in a basic "Block" program, the instructional content of which is, in part, guided by a more complex flowchart of the counseling process. The Block accounts for about 50% of the required credits and covers five sequential academic terms. While "in the Block" the trainees' behavior is "shaped"; they must practice and master a variety of skills defined by each counseling subsystem at gradually increasing levels of fidelity.

The instructional material in the "Decide Goals for Counseling" subsystem, for example, is directed toward five outcome behaviors. Early in Block 2, low fidelity performance prevails; the counselor candidate will, on paper and pencil exercises,:

1. Write a statement that turns the client's attention toward establishing a behavioral objective.
2. Distinguish between adequate and inadequate behavioral objectives.
3. Distinguish between description of clients that a counselor can or will handle and those that he cannot or will not handle.
4. Identify and sequence subtasks that develop requisite skills for

attaining the complex behavioral outcome desired.

5. Specify the problem behavior, frequency, duration, and conditions.

(From an unpublished mimeo, Department of Counseling, MSU.)

Later on in Block 2 the trainee will demonstrate these behaviors at increasingly higher levels of fidelity (e.g. in a role play situation, in response to a video tape of a client, or with a coached client). In Blocks 3 & 5 (practicum) the counselor candidate will exhibit these skills at the highest level of fidelity (i.e. with actual clients).

Instructional objectives for other subsystems in the training program at Michigan State are described in papers by Cook (1970) and Winborn (et al, 1971). One purpose of subsystem 5, for example, is to teach the prospective counselor to listen to clients with the intention of recalling data. Hence, the following objective: "After viewing a video tape of a three minute client monologue the counseling trainee must be able to list at least eight of ten autobiographic items that appear on the video tape (Winborn et al, 1971)."

## The Microcounseling Approach

Ivey and his associates at the University of Massachusetts and Colorado State University (1968) have developed a set of instructional materials designed to facilitate the learning of a number of counseling skills, namely:

1. Attending behavior:
   a. Eye contact.
   b. Postural position, movements, gestures.
   c. Verbal following (counselor's responding to a client's comment without introducing new data).
2. Reflection of feeling.
3. Summarization of feeling.

This "microcounseling" approach, involving the use of instructional packets, video equipment, and paid clients, is particularly adaptable to systematic counselor training models. It has recently been extended to include other counselor behaviors such as the communication of test results (Miller et al, 1970).

The Construction of an Instructional Goal (a Digression)

Mager (1962) has identified three steps in the writing of an instructional objective:

1. Identify the terminal behavior by name.
2. Describe the important conditions under which the behavior will be expected to occur.
3. Specify the criteria of acceptable performance by describing how well the learner must perform to be considered adequate.

Instructional objectives in counselor education may be cognitive, affective, and/or motor in nature. Raised numbers in the following examples indicate portions of the objective which satisfy each of Mager's criteria:

1. A cognitive objective: "Given a list of 15 names,[2] the student will be able to identify at least 12 of them[3] by stating their contribution to the guidance movement.[1] A total of 15 minutes will be provided to complete this task[2] (LaFleur, 1970)."
2. An affective objective: "Given a diad of counseling trainees, one trainee is given five minutes to non-verbally communicate five items of personal data such as anger, happiness, despair, interest, boredom, and confusion. The second trainee may non-verbally react, question, and check out the data received from the first trainee. At the end of five minutes,[2] the second trainee must be able to state correctly[1] four of the five items[3] of personal data (Winborn et al, 1971)."

3. A motor objective: Given a role play situation of 15 minutes duration,[2] the counselor trainee will maintain eye contact with the client[1] and exhibit a forward trunk lean[1] for a minimum of 10 minutes.[3]

Goal Relevance and Fidelity of Simulation

Relevant instructional goals are those behaviors which approximate what the counselor will or ought to be doing on the job. Traditional models of counselor education tend to ignore this point. Consider, for example, the following item from a Theories of Counseling final exam:

Which of the following persons is most closely associated with relaxation therapy?

a) Wolpe

b) Salter

c) Jacobson

d) None of these

One assumption for the inclusion of such an item (tricky distractors notwithstanding) is that it will help distinguish students who "know about" counseling techniques evolving from theory (relaxation procedures in particular) from students who do not. A common, yet unwarranted, second order assumption is that given the opportunity (perhaps eventually in practicum) the counselor candidate who circles "c" will actually be able to induce a state of relaxation in an anxious client.

If the purpose of counselor education is to distinguish trainees from one another on the basis of test scores, waiting until final exams is not necessary. Pretests have been shown to be highly reliable predictors of such low fidelity performance measures. Students can be discriminated before they even take the course!

If, on the other hand, the primary function of counselor education is to instill at least a modicum of counseling competence in our trainees, behavioral goals of higher fidelity such as the following ought to be included:

> Given a role play situation,[2] the counselor candidate will induce a state of relaxation in the client.[1] Successful completion of this objective will require the client's report of experiencing less than five subjective units of disturbance (see Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966, p. 73).[3]

High fidelity performance objectives place emphasis on the application rather than the accumulation of knowledge.

Stewart & Hinds (1970) have discussed the purposes of low and high fidelity behavioral objectives on a theoretical plane in greater detail (see Figure 3). And current research is underway at Michigan State which is investigating the degree to which the fidelity of a simulation used as a learning model (sound films vs. written transcripts) influences the learning of specific verbal interaction skills (Johnson & Engelkes, 1971). Apparently, the accumulation of knowledge is a necessary but insufficient product of counselor education.

Essentially, then, the ultimate criterion of counselor competence is generally recognized as the ability to effect adaptive changes in the cognitive, affective, motor, and/or somatic behavior of clients. It follows, therefore, that counselor preparation programs ought to be organized in such a way as to facilitate and insure the acquisition of this capacity. Systems analysis offers a useful approach for the redirection of counselor education. Intrinsic to this point of view is the formulation of high fidelity training objectives, stated in terms of what the counselor candidate will be doing as a result of instruction.

The system is divided into eight subsystems. Examples of performance areas are listed for each major subsystem.

1. GENERAL COUNSELING SKILLS
(CODE G)

Listening accuracies

Awareness of non-verbal communication

2. FOUNDATIONS
(CODE F)

Theoretical approaches to counseling

Counterculture

Sexual behavior

3. GROUP COUNSELING
(CODE M)

Marathon

Participate in counseling group

Lead and assess counseling group

4. BEHAVIOR CHANGE METHODOLOGY
(CODE B)

Relationship between behaviorism and scientific method

Operant principles

Modeling paradigm

5. DECISION MAKING SKILLS
(CODE D)

Vocational choice theories

Aiding clients in decision making

6. PREVENTIVE SYSTEMS
(CODE P)

The "System" as a client

Assertive behaviors

7. PRACTICUM
(CODE S)

Observe counseling interviews

Videotape interviews

8. RESEARCH
(CODE R)

Conduct empirical case study and present a written report for publication

Conduct systems analysis

Figure 1. The Behavioral Systems Training Program at Stanford University (From a presentation by Krumboltz, Thoreson, & Zifferblatt, 1971).

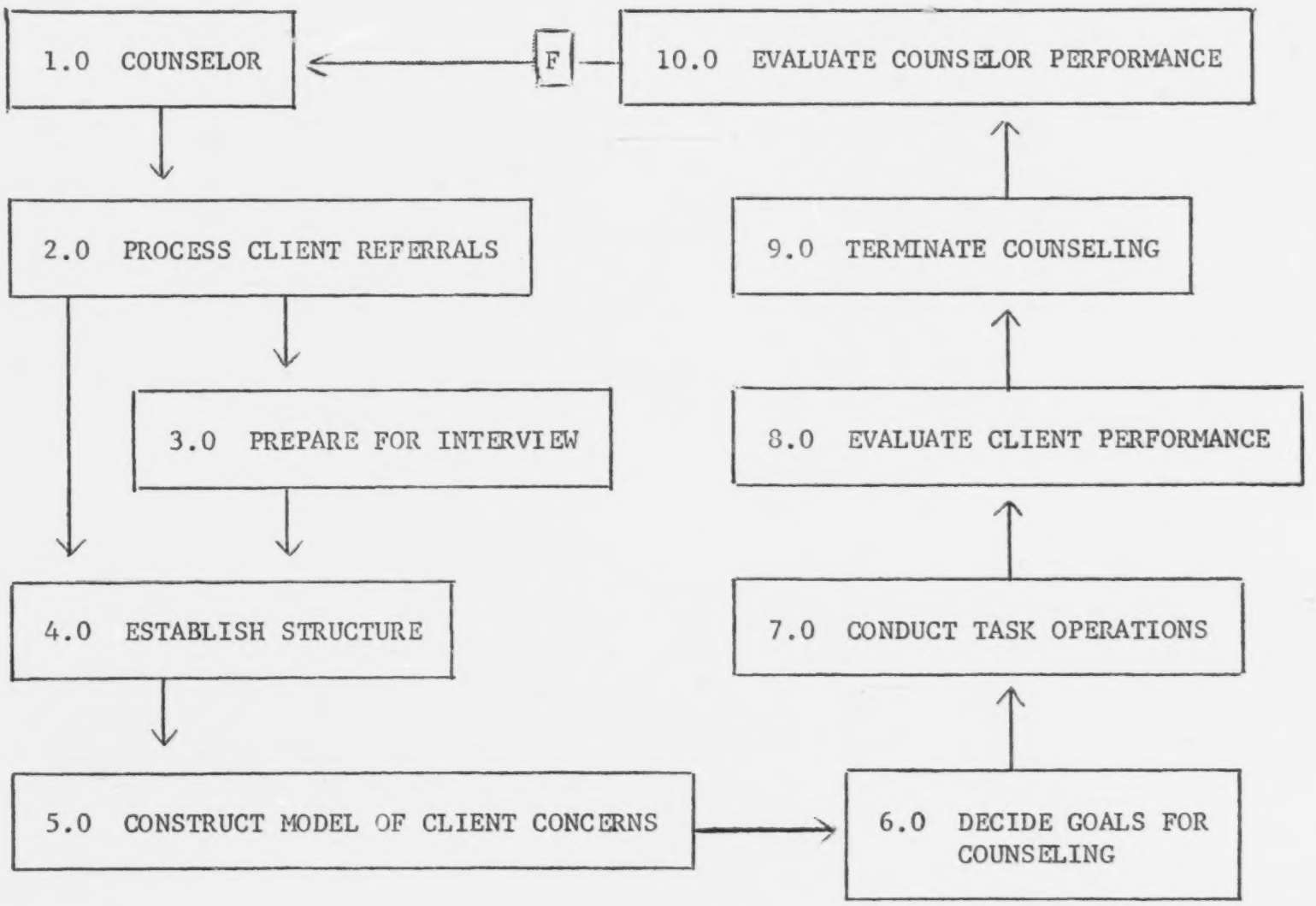


Figure 2. Basic Subsystems in the Michigan State Universicy Systematic Counseling Model. Conceptualized by Norman R. Stewart, Bob B. Winborn, Richard G. Johnson, Herbert M. Burks, Jr., James R. Engelkes, and William C. Hinds.

| Level of Simulation | Trainee Behavior | General Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| Lowest fidelity | | |
| Reading | Reading specific assignments | Overview: presentation of concepts and vocabulary |
| | Taking a self test over written material | Discrimination between concepts, practice of knowledge |
| Modeling | Watching video tapes (modeling) and paper and pencil test | Further discrimination learning, immediate knowledge of results |
| | Watching simulated counseling sessions (video) with paper and pencil tests | Further practice of knowledge; teaching for transfer |
| Role playing | Interacting with a peer as counselor | Generalized training with immediate feedback |
| Supervised practice in field | Interacting with student | Terminal behaviors |
| Highest fidelity | | |

Figure 3. Simulation chart from a presentation by Stewart & Hinds (1970).

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